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FACILITIES FOR TRAINING THE RURAL MINISTER

BY O. D. FOSTER

The survey of Theological Seminaries and Religious Training Schools, now being conducted by the Council of Church Boards of Education, is revealing many interesting facts. Naturally, many of these facts have been known before, but the data now at hand bring them to the front and make them stand out so clearly that they force themselves upon us with new emphasis and clearness.

One of the outstanding needs which has been pressing itself upon us, as we go forward with the survey, is that of adequate facilities for the preparation of the rural minister. It is quite generally believed that very little preparation is needed by the country pastor. These parishes are generally left for those who cannot get city pastorates or to those who have lost in the race in other ways. In short, the country pulpit is left to be filled largely by men who, for one reason or another, cannot compete with their "more able brothers in the city." Too much praise cannot be given the few men of exceptional ability who have given a deaf ear to "larger fields" and remained true to the challenge of the country.

Perhaps the saddest feature of all this is the fact that this situation is being taken as a matter of course, from which, judging by appearances, there is little thought of its ever being changed. The pulpit committee frankly states that "we cannot expect to get a man of such high qualifications as those required by the city church, nor can we pay the salary required for such a man." Similar remarks are familiar to every one who has had much to do in locating men in the field in question.

But that the need for strong constructive leadership in the country, as well as in the city, is imperative, is too obvious to call for discussion. The weakness of the country church today is not due to geographical or social conditions nearly so much as it is to the lack of the right sort of leadership.

We ask ourselves, "What is the cause of this situation?" Is it due to the lack of funds in the country? On the whole this cannot be the case, for the farmers as a class are quite as well to do as their city brethren. Is it due to the lack of a sufficiently large constituency in the rural district? This was not the case in earlier years, even when the parishioners were compelled to go on horseback and in wagon. With the advent of good roads and the automobile, which are the farmers' possession today, the parish is both enlarged and made more compact. The rural district therefore is not compelled, on the whole, to accept "the leavings" because there are not enough people within reach of the church. Or has the automobile taken the farmer to the city church? Truly this is often the case,

but on the whole it is not in discrimination against the country church as such, in favor of the city church. It is due largely either to social conditions or to the longing for the "abler message of the city preacher." Or is the difficulty due to a failure of the country to make an adequate appeal to young men preparing for life work? This cannot be the case as is evidenced by the attendance at our Agricultural Colleges.

May not a major difficulty lie back still further? Can the Seminary be held responsible because of its handicap to cope successfully with the situation? This is a question which one is inclined to ask after considerable study of the seminaries first hand, as well as through catalogs and questionnaires.

The Seminary today is "educating" men for the city church. Speaking broadly this statement will not be questioned. Some are even attempting to "train" men for the city pastorate. Others are endeavoring to "educate and to train" men for these places. More are stressing "education" rather than "training." They, for all intents and purposes, are holding before the student, consciously or unconsciously, the city pastorate as the final objective or goal. The "successful" seminary today is located in or near a large city, where the ideals, environment, atmosphere, training, etc., lead to the city and not back to the country.

Some seminaries are making an earnest effort to meet the need of the student preparing for the country parish by offering courses in Rural Psychology, The Country Church, Rural Parish Problems, etc. These courses are usually given to all the students enrolled in the seminary. Little or no opportunity is afforded for specializing in the rural work. If it were it would be inadequate if not a bit grotesque. Who expects one educated and trained in the country to be fitted, by that education and training, to lead in the solution and mastery of the complex problems of the modern city? Why then hope for men trained and educated in the present day seminary in the large city to be contented and successful in the accomplishment of a great life work in the country parish?

The construction of a new curriculum to meet the needs of the country minister seems essential. Many subjects would be taught the same. New Testament Greek would not vary in different types of schools, but the amount required might well vary. The same would be true with certain other subjects. The content of the older theological disciplines would not vary so much as the quantity required. There should be a great shift of emphasis toward the so-called practical courses, particularly in the rural field.

A faculty of specialists with peculiar experience and training would be imperative for a school meeting this particular need. A carefully prepared and supervised course of **training**

in actual country parishes should be provided. The holding of small pastorates, while attending the present day seminary, will not suffice. Those who claim that such pastorates are adequate for the training of the rural ministry may succeed in convincing the student of the truthfulness of the claim for a time, but it does it at great cost to the Christian Church.

But what is more important still by way of a radical change is the environment in which the training is taken as well as the content of the previous training and the environment in which that training is taken. That is to say, the one who aspires to be a real constructive engineer in the rural district must not only think in the terms of the people with whom he is to work, but he must also speak their vernacular. He, to be the most successful, will draw his illustrations from the farm and the science and art of farming. To do this, and to be the most effective, he should have sufficient agricultural training to give him as good a knowledge of farming as that possessed by his parishioners. He should also be made familiar during his course with the greatest modern developments of and for the country community.

Such a training would hold before the student constantly the ideals, occupation, social relationships, objects and subjects of general interest, etc., of those with whom he plans to live. Obviously this training and background cannot be provided by the ordinary college, university or seminary. To ask it of the seminary would add too greatly to the pressing demands already put upon it for specialization. The preparatory education and training may be had, to a satisfactory degree, only in an agricultural school. And only in connection with such a college could the seminary training men for the rural ministry meet its maximum efficiency and value.

Many strong men, who have either decided before entering college to devote their lives to the rural ministry or who would be susceptible to such a challenge, are lost for this field during their course in the modern college or university. The environment and training provided there make it more natural for the graduate to go to the city rather than to the country. Before the country pulpits are adequately manned much more serious attention will be paid to the agricultural college, both as a means of training and a source of supply.

With an agricultural turn to the pre-seminary course, as well as to the seminary training itself, the young minister would be equipped with an investment in training which would of itself tend to hold him to the country challenge. He would not think of the country parish as a "stepping stone to something higher" as does his brother who has been trained in the ordinary seminary. From the day he moved into his parsonage he would be planning his life work for the country and would

be dreaming dreams of the great rural community plants instead of how he is going to attract sufficient attention to get a call to the city and thus make an early escape from an irksome but necessary task to be endured during the course of his development.

The far-reaching result of an institution adequately preparing men for the rural ministry is not difficult to see. With the advent of such an institution a new day for the country church will be made possible. Since the redemption of the country church is one of our gravest problems today, it would seem that serious attention might well be given to the establishment of an institution which will meet this need.

What more important challenge faces the Church today than the creation of a great interdenominational seminary or training school at one of our better agricultural colleges, centrally located?

This is AN URGENT NEED.

STUDENT ATTENDANCE AT THE PROTESTANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARIES

BY O. D. FOSTER

The friends of Christian Education are vitally interested in knowing the number and quality of students in training for leadership in the Churches. They also desire to know how they are distributed by denominations, as well as how many will be available this coming year for their respective communions. To ascertain these facts, the Council sent inquiries to all the Seminaries and Training Schools in the country. Practically all of the schools have responded generously. Most of the blanks have been accurately and carefully filled out, for which the Council tenders its sincere gratitude. On the whole therefore the data which appear below are dependable.

In the study the figures from each school have been carefully tabulated, but it is not deemed wise to publish the detailed information from the individual institutions. Instead we have given below the results in groups or denominations rather than by particular schools. For example, the seminaries of all branches of Lutherans are grouped together, as are all the Seminaries which have maintained through their history either an organic or merely a close co-operative relationship with Congregational churches. Other groups are treated accordingly. The necessity of such treatment will be obvious.

The table below will show in analyzed form the complete summaries of the data on student attendance in respect to denominational affiliation and connection both as regards institutions and students. The left hand column lists the number